

Gaining Access

by Mike Matson

Rural Kansans who lack access to high-speed broadband Internet service are closer to the promised land than ever before.

Kansas Farm Bureau and the Information Network of Kansas (INK) have provided close to 20 percent in matching funds and helped secure approximately \$2 million from the U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to fund broadband mapping and planning activities in Kansas.

These activities are a component of the Connect Kansas initiative through the Kansas Department of Commerce aimed at increasing high-speed Internet access in the state's underserved rural areas.

Connect Kansas is a subsidiary of Connected Nation and was commissioned by the Kansas Department of Commerce to work with all Kansas broadband providers to create detailed maps of broadband coverage to accurately pinpoint remaining gaps in broadband availability. Connect Kansas will develop and update the broadband data as it is collected.

For Farm Bureau members in Kansas, high-speed Internet access is an essential component of staying on the farm. Those with dial-up service feel as though they're being left behind.

"It's a concern for my wife, Amy, and I to not have high speed Internet access for our children," says Matt Perrier, Greenwood County cattle rancher. "If it takes them 20 minutes to just go through a webpage to research something for a school project, and it takes their friends in town only 30 seconds, my kids are at a huge disadvantage."

In order to have a clear understanding of the broadband landscape in Kansas, Connect Kansas encourages all Kansas residents to participate in a brief (five minute) technology assessment. The assessment is designed to gauge how citizens are using the Internet,

how they get online and the roadblocks that may prevent them from connecting.

Brenda Dooley, who lives in rural Jewell County, took the assessment using her existing dial-up Internet service.

"It's very, very frustrating and it's beginning to make me feel like a second-class citizen. In the rural communities, we have labor, we have people who are willing to work in this area and we have a wonderful lifestyle out here if we can provide jobs to them."



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That's a key component of Kansas Farm Bureau's rural development mantra: Rural Kansas communities can diversify their economies through an infusion of locally driven entrepreneurial innovations. But it simply will not happen without high-speed Internet access.

Prairie Star newspaper editor Rudy Taylor is helping lead the effort in Sedan,

one of three pilot communities in the Kansas Hometown Prosperity Initiative. He understands his community's demographics. And its proclivities.

"A lot of people simply don't have the time, the money or the inclination to 'go.' That's why they need to 'go' by Internet and that requires broadband Internet access."

The broadband mapping is the key first step in a much broader effort to make sure rural Kansans have access to broadband service and are using the technology.

With your help, Connect Kansas will be able to gain a better understanding of broadband disparities in the state and use the information in conjunction with the broadband inventory maps to best assist in Kansas's commitment to improve broadband availability and adoption.

Visit www.connectkansas.org and take the survey. Especially if you have dial-up service. It may take a while but the information gathered is essential to helping bring high-speed broadband service.



MAKING FRIENDS. Connect Kansas is a subsidiary of Connected Nation and was commissioned by the Kansas Department of Commerce to work with all Kansas broadband providers to create detailed maps of broadband coverage to accurately pinpoint remaining gaps in broadband availability. Connect Kansas shared their goals at the recent American Farm Bureau Federation convention in Seattle.